

PART EIGHT

IDENTIFICATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THE ROMAN ROUTE FROM BOLOGNA TO FIESOLE AND PROBABLE ALTERNATIVE ROUTES DURING THE IMPERIAL AGE

CHAPTER XIX

THE ROUTE FROM COLOMBAIOTTO BRIDGE TO FIESOLE

1 - Difficulty in perceiving clues and caution in the interpretation of place names.

2 - The morphology of the area alone indicated the most probable route of the road from Colombaiotto bridge to Fiesole.

1 - Difficulty in perceiving clues and caution in the interpretation of place names.

Prior to the discovery of Colombaiotto bridge, we explored the hills south of the Sieve, searching for the continuation of the Roman route towards Fiesole. Ancient historic sources all mentioned the existence of extensive marshland in the river valley east of Bilancino. Therefore, common sense suggested that the Roman road would have avoided the marshland and ascended towards the hills of S. Giovanni in Petroio and Trebbio. After the fortunate discovery of the bridge, right where we had predicted, any remaining doubts regarding the continuation of the road in a straight line were dispelled. We dedicated our efforts to finding the route towards Fiesole, observing the orography and ignoring existing roads and buildings.

For those who live in the midst of sprawling residential and industrial settlements, it is a huge effort to imagine what the landscape must have looked like two thousand years earlier. Everything manmade has to be ignored because it simply did not exist two thousand years ago.

In intensely inhabited areas, such as the Sieve and Carza valleys (and even more so near Fiesole and Florence), there is a network of roads linking a mass of large towns and small hamlets; it is extremely difficult to delete these presences and they unconsciously influence our thoughts. In particular, the present-day road system distracts anyone attempting to guess the route of a road that has long disappeared.

We found it difficult to observe

the valleys, hills and ridges without ignoring the web of tarmac and dirt roads. Undoubtedly, our search in the uncontaminated woods on the Apennine range was much easier. For centuries, only hurried wayfarers had travelled through these woods, doing nothing to modify nature. Here, nature had not quite hidden the traces of an ancient presence, allowing us to read the remains of a distant past.

The area south of the Sieve was extremely different. We immediately gave up any hope of finding tangible proof of the road; at most, we could evaluate whether any causal discoveries unearthed in the past (and perhaps mentioned in archaeological guides or hinted at by local clues) could be linked to the road.

We learned of nothing. After all, this was not surprising, considering that the Roman road did not need to be paved in this area as it did on the high altitudes of the Apennine range. Very probably, once the *glarea* road was no longer used for long-distance journeys and no longer needed to be maintained, it soon lost its main road status, was downgraded to a local road and subjected to the modifications and improvements forced by the requirements of new settlements.

We also considered the place names but with due caution. With the passing of time, if the same place has seen a sequence of settlements and events of varying weight, the name of the most recent event is often handed down. Just as one



S. Giovanni in Petroio: *a very recent image of the church.*

one settlement can be superimposed on another; the same can apply to place names, so that one cancels the other.

Therefore, to avoid falling into interpretational errors, it is necessary to identify the exact age being referred to, otherwise one risks depending on clues that are too distant from each other in terms of time and which fail to provide a correct historic reconstruction.

The concept of “distant from each other in terms of time” requires explanation.

Just as when one looks at the horizon and distant images are superimposed on each other and appear to be close together, when studying events in ancient history we tend to reduce temporal space without perceiving the modifications that took place over 50 or 100 years. For example, when we think of an event that occurred in 200 B.C. or 100 B.C., we do not give the correct weight to the temporal historic, political and environmental differences that occurred during those 100 years because we have the impression that little change took place.

However, we have a different perception of more recent time. In fact, when considering an event that dates back to 1900, although 100 years have passed we instinctively capture the multitude of events that distinguished the past century and the enormous developments and differences matured in every area of human activity. This utterly instinctive flattening of remote events creates

a false idea of those distant events, especially as concerns intervention on the ground.

Therefore, the layout of the settlements and road system between the one hundred years from 150 B.C. to 50 B.C. cannot be considered stationary; huge changes took place that must be considered according to their chronology. This means a place name must not only be considered in its local context, but it must also be correctly placed in its original historic context, so that the chronology of the area can be precisely reconstructed.

An example that anticipates a topic dealt with in paragraph 5 of chapter XXI, clarifies this concept. The place names “Terzolle”, “Quinto”, “Sesto Fiorentino”, “Settimello”, etc. are place names near Florence, that unwind towards Barberino del Mugello. Scholars have always maintained that these place names originate from Roman milestones and, therefore, map out a Roman route towards the Apennines. We have no objection to this interpretation.

However, we do object when they identify this route as the first transapennine route built by C. Flaminius, proving that they did not first ascertain the historic context and motivations for the birth of these place names. This road was built

after Florence had been founded by the Romans, therefore it was built over one hundred years after C. Flaminius' route. Obviously, these place names have been handed down to us because the second route lasted longer and replaced the first, which was abandoned and fell into oblivion.

2 - The morphology of the area alone indicated the most probable route of the road from Colombaiotto bridge to Fiesole.

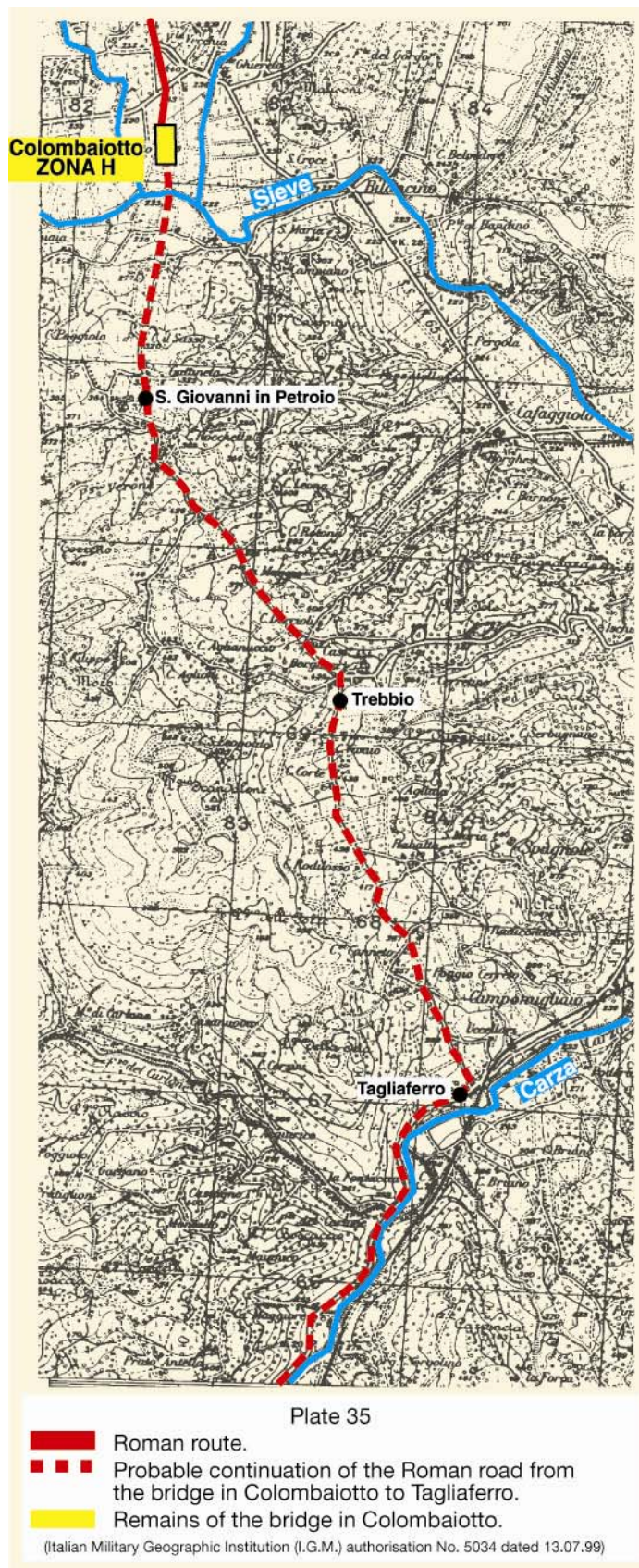
The lack of place names that definitely date back to the first half of the 2nd century B.C. and the lack of reliable archaeological finds in the area between Colombaiotto bridge and Fiesole, forced us to rely only on a detailed exploration of the area, in an attempt to understand which route "our road" could have followed in relation to the morphology of the landscape. We imagined those wild hills and valleys covered by woods and without any settlements¹ of any importance, criss-crossed by a web of paths worn only by the feet of primitive people. We believe that it was only with the arrival of the Etruscans that the road system took on a true transapennine significance.

We decided to reach Fiesole on foot, as did our ancestors for thousands of years.

Where the existence of natural obstacles allowed, the most logical thing to do was stick to the straightest route.

We were convinced that once Flaminius crossed the Sieve near Colombaiotto bridge (233 metres above sea level), he would have continued straight on, up to S. Giovanni in Petroio (372 above sea level) and onwards to Trebbio (435 above sea level), then re-descending to Tagliaferro (250 above sea level) in the valley of the river Carza. This route covered six kilometres and descended about 200 metres with an average gradient of 6.45%.

The route from Tagliaferro headed directly to Fiesole and probably coasted the left bank of the Carza from north to south. It continued along the valley floor with a very slight ascent for about 7 kilometres to beyond



¹ Undoubtedly there must have been a few Etruscan-Ligurian villages dotted around the hills, especially along the route of the pre-Roman transapennine path, but they could not have been important enough to condition the choice of C. Flaminius' route.



S. Giovanni in Petroio (April 1997): the cart track that descends in a straight line from S. Giovanni in Petroio towards Colombaiotto bridge probably retraces the Roman route. The Bilancino dam is on the right.

Fontebuona (337 above sea level), almost coinciding with the present-day trunk road 65. It then continued straight along the western slopes of Poggio Torricella and reached Uccellatoio at an altitude of 489 above sea level, where it started to descend towards Fontesecca². From here, it resumed its route along the ridge, as does the present-day trunk road, passing through the villages of Trespiano and Lastra. A few hundred metres further south (near the present-day “Il Cionfo”) it probably diverged off to the east in a straight line (like the present day tarmac road) heading along a steep downward slope as far as the torrent Mugnone, beyond which it re-ascended to Fiesole.

Although we do not deny the great importance of Fiesole at this moment in history when Rome consolidated its dominion in Cispadania, we are convinced the road did not turn towards the urban centre of Fiesole at “Il Cionfo”, but continued straight on towards the Arno where it joined the existing pre-Roman road system, heading



Plate 36
Probable Roman route from Vaglia
to Montorsoli.

(Italian Military Geographic Institution (I.G.M.) authorisation No. 5034 dated 13.07.99)

² We do not believe the Roman road followed the route of trunk road 65 through Pratolino in this point, because it would have passed on the eastern versant of Poggio Torricella, when the Romans always preferred the western versant.

towards Arezzo³ and the centre of Etruria, towards Volterra.

In fact, when planning the route of a long distance road, the Romans always preferred the shortest route even if this meant missing important settlements. In this case, a diversion towards Fiesole would have implied more disadvantages than advantages. It would have been necessary to overcome a steep gradient (a 120-metre difference in level) from Cionfo to Mugnone, and then a steep climb (a 215-metre difference in level) to Fiesole, over a stretch of just 2 kilometres. Thus, in this case too, a short and practical long distance road, linked to Fiesole by a very short diversion was preferable. Furthermore, its continuation in a straight line joined up with the right bank of the Arno where, although “*Florentia*” did not yet exist, there was already an important trade centre whose luck had probably increased thanks to the presence of a river port and a bridge that linked the transapennine road system with Volterra.

Therefore, according to the logic outlined by the morphology of the area, after Cionfo, Flaminius’ road continued along the route of the “Bolognese road” heading towards the Arno along a route that passed through the present-day Piazza della Libertà, Via S. Gallo and Piazza S. Giovanni. We share without reservation the opinion expressed by Daniele Sterpos⁴ in the 1960’s, before the numerous archaeological finds described in this book were discovered: “*many also believe there was a Roman road from Bologna that passed through the Savena valley towards the Futa pass, which entered the Mugello valley and exited near Pratolino and then descended to Florence along the ridge between Terzolle and Mugnone: it could also have retraced a route followed by the Etruscans during their expansion north of the Apennines. The age of either end of the route appears to be proven (omissis)... towards Florence the discovery of*

funerary steles trace a road from Pratolino to the gate of S. Gallo and onwards to Piazza S. Giovanni, where a Roman gate has been recognised”.

This theory regarding the first Roman road through Florence was later confirmed by Sterpos in 1981, who after carrying out an in-depth study on the matter⁵ came to the following conclusion: *I do not believe that after entering the Mugello valley, Flaminius headed towards Fiesole. He may have crossed the Sieve near*

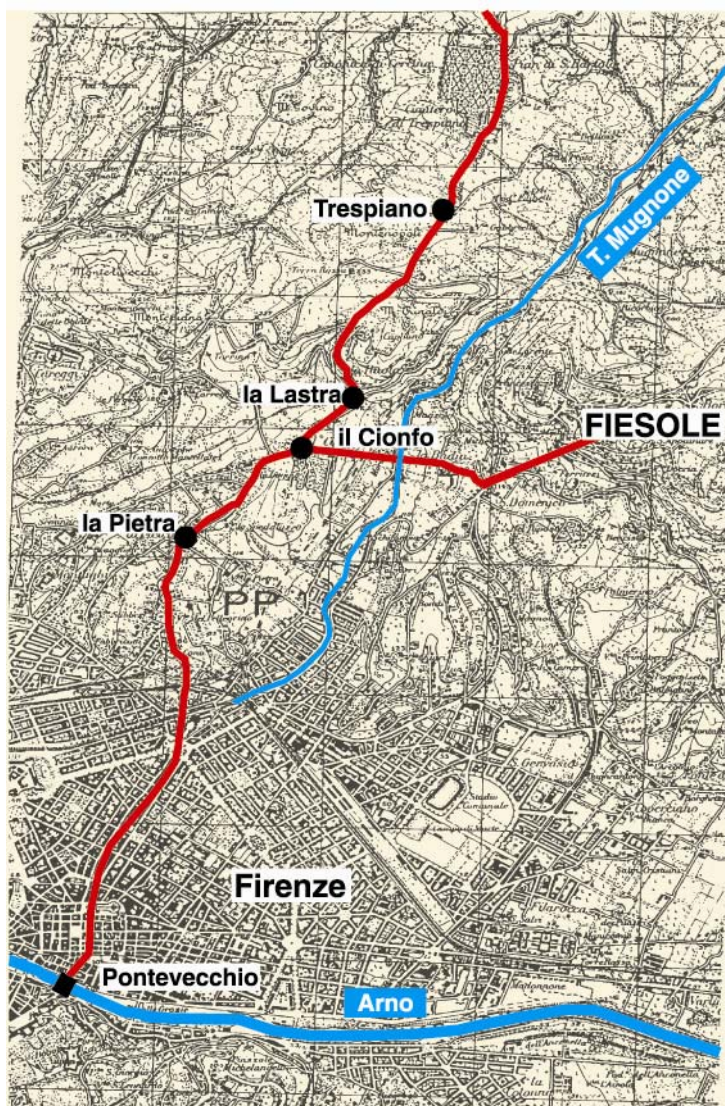


Plate 37
Probable Roman route from Trespiano to the river Arno with diversion to Fiesole.

(Italian Military Geographic Institution (I.G.M.) authorisation No. 5034 dated 13.07.99)

³ From the bank of the Arno, C. Flaminius continued to build the road as far as Arezzo, probably following the existing road system along the route, which was later called the Via Cassia.

⁴ Daniele Sterpos: “Comunicazioni stradali attraverso i tempi: Bologna-Firenze” published by Soc. Autostrade S.p.A. and by Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara 1961, page 11.

⁵ Daniele Sterpos: “La viabilità romana e la prima storia del Mugello”, work cited, page 4.



Westward view from Fiesole: the numerous buildings along the opposite ridge, beyond the river Mugnone, follow the straight line of the present-day trunk road 65 (“della Futa”) between Trespiano and La Lastra; very probably the first Roman road retraced the same route towards the Apennine pass.

Bilancino; (omissis) [the road] then climbed towards S. Giovanni in Petroio and Spugnole, and descended towards Tagliaferro. From here it may have re-ascended the Carza as far as Pratolino and then continued towards Florence, as does the present day road, not passing through Fiesole but below, converging with the Etruscan road (and this is the important point) which certainly went from Fiesole to Arezzo and which in part coincided with the present-day Sette Ponti road”.

Our search on the Tuscan versant ended here, on the right bank of the Arno, where “*Florentia*” was founded in the middle of the 1st century B.C. We leave to other enthusiasts the identification of the exact route to Arezzo, hoping that our efforts contribute towards providing certainty at least about the Apennine route.

However, we suggest seriously considering the route indicated by Antonio Bacci⁶, who has studied with particular care the traces of the stretch of road from Arezzo to Florence that can be attributed to the consul C. Flaminius. Here we limit ourselves to just quoting his opinion about the subject⁷: “*The new road from Bologna to Arezzo must have been very important if Livy mentions its construction (no mention is made of numerous other consular roads such as the Cassia or the Clodia). Therefore, this road could not have been either a path or a mule track: a consul and his legions built this road and it was evidently a memorable feat (omissis).*

Therefore, the route between Bologna and Arezzo was a road of considerable importance at least in the time of Livy, and thus already

⁶ Antonio Bacci. “Strade romane e medievali nel territorio aretino”; Grafiche Calosci, Cortona, 1985.

⁷ Antonio Bacci. “Il territorio aretino”; in Minutes of the Convention “La viabilità tra Bologna e Firenze nel tempo” published by Costa Editore, Bologna, 1992.

at the start of the Empire, it must have still been the route normally used between the two cities (omissis).

Therefore, there were two main roads from Arezzo to Bologna over the centuries:

- 1) Via Casentino, through Subbiano, Bagno di Romagna and Forlì, which joined the Via Aemilia; this road was described in detail during the 12th century in the Annales Stadenses, and indicated in maps by the Canonica Aretina in the 11th century.*
- 2) Via Valdarno, through Quarata, Ponte Buriano, Monsoglio, Pian di Laterina, Ponte Romito, Montalto, Levane, Ponte di Levane, Montevarchi, S. Giovanni, Figline, Incisa, the S. Donato pass, L'Apparita,*

Bigallo, Bagno a Ripoli, Ponte Vecchio, Firenze.

Of the two, I do not believe the Via Casentino was built by Flaminius. This road links Arezzo to Forlì and seems to presume the existence of the Via Aemilia, which we know was built at the same time as the road we are looking for. On the other hand, Forlì is too far from Bologna and this would be stretching Livy's indication "to Bononia" beyond any logic or reason.

Therefore, this leaves us with the Valdarno, which was in effect a grandiose road: it featured great bridges (the bridge at Buriano, reconstructed in 1277 features 7 spans), milestone place names (Trigesimo near Levane, Vigesimo near Figline, Quarto in Bagno a Ripoli), and a practical route".

CHAPTER XX

THE ROUTE FROM MOUNT VENERE TO BOLOGNA

- 1 - From mount Venere to mount Adone.
- 2 - The detour around mount Adone.
- 3 - The strategic position of Brento.
- 4 - From mount Adone to Bologna.
- 5 - The important pre-Roman transapennine pathway conditioned the choice of location for founding *Bononia* and showed C. Flaminius which route to follow.

1 - From mount Venere to mount Adone.

Just as on the Florentine versant from Colombaiotto bridge to Fiesole, on the Bolognese versant from mount Venere to Bologna, we were not able to use any archaeological evidence based on the discovery of stretches of Roman road. We did not even attempt to carry out any excavations because we were convinced that due to the geology of this part of the ridge, the Romans would not have paved the road but would have just flattened the already solid and well-drained ground, and therefore the road would be impossible to date¹. Only between Pieve del Pino and Paderno, due to the presence of scaly clay, would paving have been indispensable, but even if paving had been laid, it would certainly now be impossible for us to find any traces due to the constant water erosion and seepage that form the typical “calanchi” (erosion furrows).

We also thought that the numerous settlements near Bologna and the intense use of the route during the Middle Ages would have certainly destroyed any surviving stretches of the paved road.

After noting that neither archaeological cartography nor local guidebooks mention any significant finds, we intensified our surface investigations, bearing in mind the clear and obvious orography. In fact, the ridge that follows the left of the Savena torrent from its source progressively descends as far as the plain where *Bononia* was founded. Because stretches of the Roman road exist on the summit of this ridge from mount Poggiaccio to mount Venere, almost certainly its route continued northwards, along the same watershed². Thanks to its direction and altimetry, this ridge was the most convenient route to Bologna, and because it maintained a certain altitude, it was possible to control the Savena valley on the right and the Setta valley on the left below.

Thus we started our explorations from mount Venere towards the north, making good use of the experience gained from our former searches (which always forced us to follow the top of the ridge - however only when the altimetry did not present sudden slopes that would have forced a useless ascent or descent).

¹ The discovery of the remains of the *glarea* road in Predosa, described in chapter XV, was due to a rare combination of favourable environmental circumstances that have preserved them and good luck.

² This not only coincides with the elementary logic of ancient road systems, in the preliminary considerations regarding his research into the “*Flaminia Militare*” Nereo Alfieri states (work cited, page 56): “... *In practice, if it were possible to identify the pass or a mountain stretch of the Via Flaminia “minore”, it would be reasonable to think that its continuation would follow the initial furrow and spur.*”

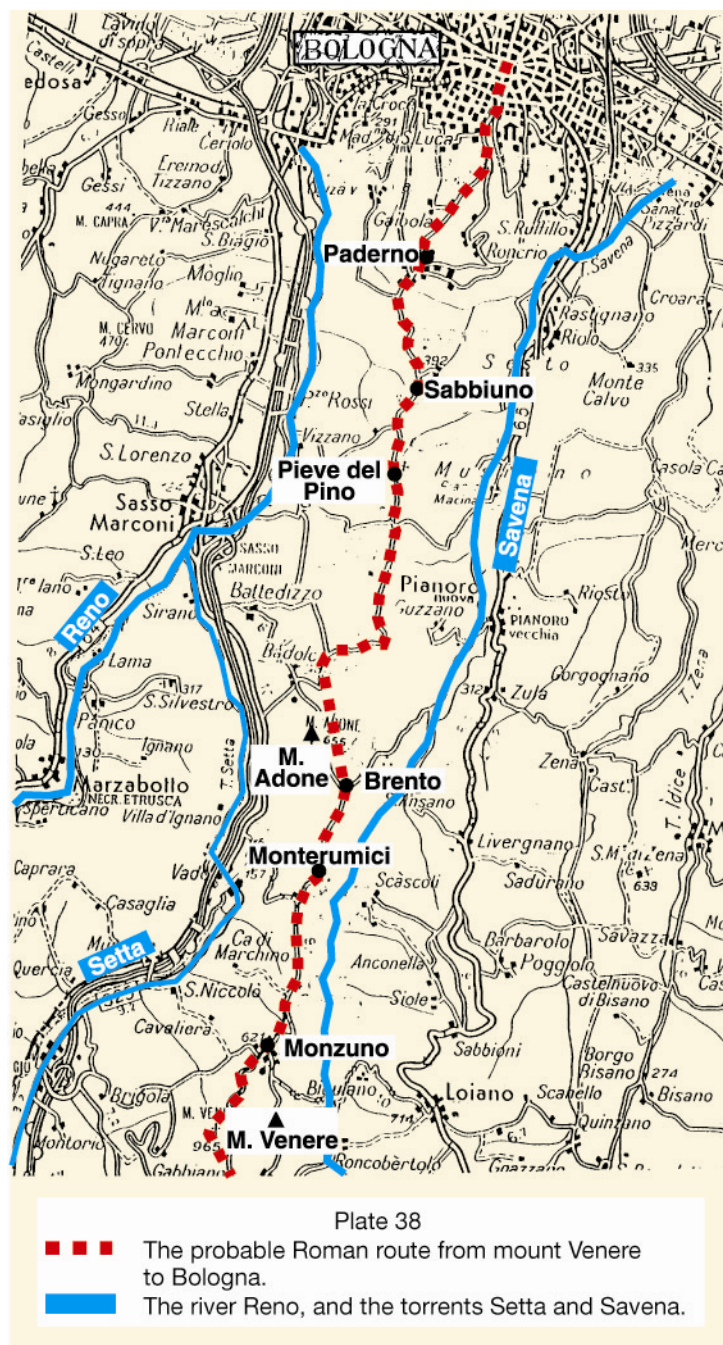


Mount Venere (965 metres above sea level): *the western versant of mount Venere. The Roman road probably passed below the peak (at the lower edge of the present-day conifer wood) maintaining an altitude aligned with the direction of the ridge to avoid ascending and then descending the peak.*

With these principles in mind, we looked for the Roman road. On the upper western slopes of mount Venere (the preferred versant because more exposed to the sun), we only found a north-south cart road which passes below the peak and rejoins the ridge descending towards Monzuno; its position, direction and straightness suggests that it runs along the ancient route³.

Instead, the present carriage road runs along the eastern versant of mount Venere and then rejoins the ridge descending towards the north. This area of the route is treeless; therefore, it is possible to see the ridge that heads straight towards mount Adone.

Just below the peak of mount Venere (at an altitude of 850 above sea level), the road descends to Monzuno (621 metres above sea level) with a gradient of about 9%; this 3 kilometre stretch features the most significant difference in level of the entire transapennine route. This proves the extreme overall convenience of the route considering that for the Romans,



a gradient of 15% along mountain stretches was considered acceptable⁴.

From Monzuno, the ridge continues its gentle descent; the Roman route must have run along the ridge as far as Monterumici

³ Unlike the fate of other stretches, we are convinced that even many centuries after its construction, this point of the Roman route has never undergone any diversions thanks to the stability of the ground. This theory may be confirmed by a 9th century document that records the passage of the Via Clodia through Gabbiano, a small village on the western slopes of mount Venere, about 1 kilometre below its peak. Chapter XXI, paragraph 4, provides more detail about this historic source.

⁴ Lionel Casson: work cited, page 138: "Grades were carefully adjusted, but were rather steep by our standards, going as high as 15 per cent. At the Maloja pass between Italy and Switzerland, for example, the modern road uses twenty-two curves to get up a slope that the ancient took in three".



Mount Venere (965 metres above sea level): *the present-day cart track on the upper western slopes of mount Venere probably retraces the straight line of the Roman route.*

where it probably avoided the peak by passing along the western slope, thus maintaining an altitude that allowed it to rejoin the profile of the ridge top without significant differences in level ⁵.

North of Monterumici, the two valleys of the Savena and the Setta draw very near to each other, to the extent that the ridge narrows so much that there is no other alternative other than the route along its summit. This orographic condition, identical today to the situation two thousand years ago, forced modern engineers to build the provincial road from Monzuno to Brento exactly along the top of this practically flat watershed.

Here too we had no doubt that the provincial road exactly retraced the Roman road and dissuaded us from carrying out any explorations beyond this route.

⁵ The western slope of Monterumici is very rough due to the repeated landslides, which have also undoubtedly swept away the Roman road.



Mount Venere (965 metres above sea level): *sheep grazing on the eastern slopes of mount Venere from where it is possible to view the Apennine chain. Loiano is on the horizon.*



Mount Venere (965 metres above sea level): *even the present-day tarmac road that descends from mount Venere towards the north follows the summit of the ridge, aligned exactly with mount Adone, which can be seen on the horizon.*

Photograph taken from the top of mount Adone: *the present-day provincial road that heads south from Brento unwinds along the exact summit of the ridge retracing the ancient transapennine route that continued towards Monterumici (in the foreground) and mount Venere (in the background). The Savena valley follows the entire ridge (on the horizon) and where we discovered the Roman road.*





Mount Adone (655 metres above sea level - south versant): *the straight line of the ridge descending from Monterumici towards Brento is still used by the tarmac road. It is interrupted by the impressive massif of mount Adone.*

2 - The detour around mount Adone

Finding the continuation of the route towards Bologna was more difficult near mount Adone, which rises imposingly on the ridge top, interrupting the descent towards north. When the present-day road from Monzuno reaches the first spurs of mount Adone, it forks off, avoiding the obstacle: the eastern fork goes through Brento and descends rapidly towards the Savena, which it reaches at Pianoro Vecchio; the western fork runs along the base of its rocky walls as far as Badolo. After numerous verifications and explorations, we were convinced that the ancient track, used first by the Etruscans and then by the Romans did not follow either of the modern routes, for two reasons:

- the present-day eastern route leaves the summit of the ridge at Brento and descends down into the bed of the torrent Savena, which it follows as far as Bologna. We do not believe that the Etruscans, coming

Mount Adone (655 metres above seal level - west versant): *the impressive and rocky western walls of mount Adone stand almost vertical; during all ages, they have constituted an impassable obstacle.*



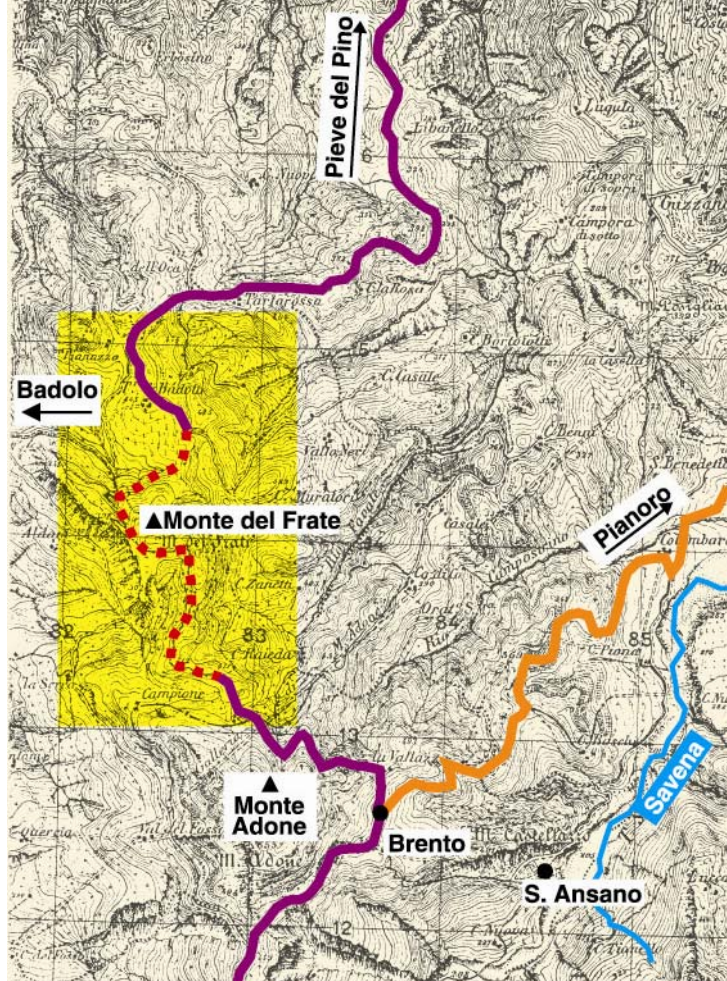


Plate 39

Probable Roman route around mount Adone:

- The present-day carriage road.
- - - Present-day footpath.
- Present-day provincial road towards Pianoro

(Italian Military Geographic Institution (I.G.M.) authorisation No. 5034 dated 13.07.99).

from Fiesole and travelling along the top of the ridge, abandoned it 20 kilometres before Felsina, when they could have continued along it as far as Felsina. Neither do we think that the Romans preferred to construct a military road in a valley; a road that was designed to police the heights and guarantee security along this important transapennine link.

- The western versant of mount Adone consists in vertical walls that rise about one-hundred metres above the Setta valley and, together with the Pliocene spur that stands over Badolo, formed an unsurpassable barrier, which would have made the construction of a 2.40-metre wide military road extremely demanding.

Furthermore, any road built below these rocky walls would have easily been open to attack by enemies who managed to take possession of the positions above. Therefore, a route along the western versant would have been illogical considering it would have been more convenient to make a detour around the massif of mount Adone on the eastern versant, where the slopes descend downhill without any rocky walls. These considerations convinced us that we had to look for the Roman route on the eastern versant of mount Adone, although the morphology of this versant also featured a few uncertainties. It was only thanks to the decisive contribution by Carlo Alvisi ⁶ (to whom we would like to express our thanks) that we were able to shine light on the probable route used by the Romans to get round mount Adone. The results of his research (with which we agree entirely) identified the following itinerary on the eastern versant:

- from the first spurs of the mount Adone massif, the route follows the present-day provincial road to Brento (at an altitude of 451 metres above sea level). After Brento,



Mount Adone (544 metres above seal level - north versant): *the present-day gravel road that heads towards mount Del Frate subsequently turns into a path that coasts its western slopes and then the eastern slopes of mount Adone, joining the dirt track to Brento.*

⁶ Professor Carlo Alvisi, professor of Neurosurgery at Bologna University and an expert Rambler, has crossed the Apennines on foot from Bologna to Fiesole on numerous occasions, following where possible the Roman route. Enthusiastic about our research, he often accompanied us in our explorations and in this case suggested to us the detour around mount Adone: he published an article about the topic in the magazine "Savena, Setta, Sambro" (Year II n.1 - 1992, I six monthly period, page 106).

the route turns left along the municipal carriage road which rises, going around the base of the eastern side of the massif, and heads towards the village of “Campione”;

- about one kilometre after Brento, the route leaves the municipal road and continues along a gravel cart road, which then turns into a dirt track coasting the eastern slopes of the Pliocene spur along level ground at a constant altitude of about 500 metres above sea level;

- after a further 700-800 metres, the cart track is reduced to a path that goes around the western slopes of mount Del Frate (at an altitude of 541 above sea level), and then joins a gravel road, that after 400 metres, reaches the tarmac road (at an altitude of 450 metres above sea level) towards Pieve del Pino.

In conclusion, by following this route, mount Adone and mount Del Frate are avoided by travelling just 3 kilometres along an almost level cart road and path, easily tackled in any weather. In fact, from the altitude of 449 above sea level at the bifurcation of the road coming from Monzuno, the road follows the Badolo-Pieve del Pino route (440 metres above sea level), after reaching the maximum altitude of 520 metres on the upper slopes of mount Del Frate.

3 - The strategic position of Brento.

The mount Adone massif interrupts the linear trend of the ridge descending from the pass at mount Poggiaccio, rising above the transapennine road like a natural bulwark defending Bologna. We have already highlighted how, for a number of kilometres to the south, the torrents Savena and Setta respectively on the right and left of the ridge, come so close together that there is no alternative route other than along the ridge. In this position, the watershed becomes a veritable viaduct that ends against the rugged cliffs of mount Adone.

It is intuitive that, from the most ancient times, such an impressive natural defence (aided by the presence of mount Castellazzo with its vertical cliffs reaching eastwards

and touching the waters of the Savena) was a carefully guarded position from where it was easy to control the compulsory passage of the transapennine track.

Brento was the ideal place for such a garrison, and is often mentioned in ancient historiography. We are certain that before the Roman conquest, Brento was a defensive bulwark used by the Gauls against enemies from Etruria, as theorised in the description of the parish of S. Ansano in Brento⁷: *“It is not known whether Brento, the ancient Brintum of the Romans, was established by the Etruscans, Boi Gauls or the Romans themselves; however, we are tempted to believe that because Brento closes the mountains belonging to the ancient Boi region, it was the most suitable place to defend the area against access from Etruria. Therefore, perhaps Brento was founded by the Boi Gauls and was home to one of the one-hundred-and-ten tribes of this Nation, and thus in the times of the Republic of Rome it was a large and well-equipped city”*.

It is normal that with time, an increasingly sprawling urban centre grew up around an initial fortified nucleus, encouraged by two essential conditions that always determined the birth and growth of settlements in antiquity:

- the security provided by the presence of military garrisons;
- the trade promoted and encouraged by the transapennine road.

And if, as appears probable, Brento was founded by the Boi Gauls, the Romans undoubtedly contributed towards increasing its importance with the construction of a true road which retraced a former route and considerably improved the conditions of the road system.

It is not surprising therefore, that Ludovico Savioli⁸ mentions Brento quoting the “*Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis*” by Agnello:

“In his opinion, Brento was a city not far from Bononiensi Urbe; today it is a small village between Pianoro and Monzone beyond the Savena, located on the ancient military road mentioned in note (S) of the first Section”.

Therefore, Brento is mentioned as being a “city” so important that during the age of Valentinian

⁷ “Le chiese parrocchiali della Diocesi di Bologna ritratte e descritte “ - volume III - Bologna, S. Tommaso printing works, 1844.

⁸ Ludovico Savioli: “Compendio storico preliminare agli Annali bolognesi dall’anno di Roma 363 al 1274”; section II, page 59.

III, it was a bishop's residence⁹ located, according to Savioli, on the ancient military road built by C. Flaminius.

Its position along a main road induced the Barbarians¹⁰, to destroy Brento at the start of the 5th century A.D. because it was along their path during their first invasion of Italy. After a period of decay, Brento reacquired its ancient strategic importance and at the end of the 6th century A.D., there is news of the existence of a castle¹¹, probably built by the Byzantines as an extreme Bolognese defensive bulwark against probable attacks by the Lombards from the south along the Roman transapennine itinerary.

Mention is also made of the castle in Brento in the middle of the 8th century, proving again the strategic importance through the ages of its position at the foot of mount Adone.

4 - From mount Adone to Bologna.

In the second paragraph, we describe the detour around mount Adone which ends by rejoining the tarmac road along the watershed. The modern road system still exploits the summit of the ridge towards Bologna and goes through Pieve del



Pieve del Pino (320 metres above sea level): *the road that links Pieve del Pino to Paderno still follows the summit of the ridge more or less retracing the straight line of the Roman route.*

Pino, Sabbiuino and Paderno, maintaining an altitude between 400 and 300 metres above sea level for about 14 kilometres, along a regular descent as far as Paderno (267 metres above sea level). Then, after just a few kilometres, it rapidly descends as far as

⁹ Contemporary scholars in particular have widely discussed the authenticity of the information provided by Agnello in his "Liber Pontificalis Ecclesiae Ravennatis" as regards the decree by Valentinian III, which attributed to the Church of Ravenna fourteen Dioceses in Emilia and Romagna, including the diocese of Brento. This interpretative controversy already existed at the end of the 18th century: Ludovico Savioli (work cited, page 59) wrote the following about the matter: "*The authenticity of the same Decree published by Ughelli and Rossi has been discussed by critics. However, this has made the facts no less certain. The Decree records the fourteen Churches attributed to the Church of Ravenna, and that is : Sarsina, Cesena, Forlimpopoli, Forlì, Faenza, Foro di Cornelio, Bologna, Modena, Reggio, Parma, Piacenza, Bersello, Vicovenza, and Adria. The first Pontifical confirmation entered in the public deeds of the Church of Ravenna is given to Mariniano, Archbishop by Pope Gregory in about the year 595. Two churches were added, Comacchio and Ficcole, now called Cervia. Agnello is the only source to mention Brento in his Pontifical book, and he includes it among the fourteen [churches]. In his opinion, Brento was a city not far from Bononiensi Urbe (Omissis)*".

Savioli substantially recognises the information as authentic ("*However, the facts have been made no less certain*") that Brento was important enough to have been the seat of a diocese. Those who now question the authenticity of the document, tend to deny the status of Diocese enjoyed by Brento and even uphold that *Brintum* should be interpreted as *Brixillum* (the present-day Brescello, 27 kilometres northwest of Reggio Emilia) implying that the author of the document confused the two places (A. Benati: "I confini occidentali ed orientali della diocesi bolognese nell'alto Medioevo", in "Ravennatensia", II - 1972, page 365; P. Guidotti "Le strade transapenniniche bolognesi nel Duecento"; Bologna, 1988, page 84). With the utmost good will, we do not understand on what basis these contemporary scholars found their doubts regarding the authenticity of the document, which instead appears clear and unequivocal. So unequivocal that when the author mentions *Brintum* he specifies its location underlining that it was not far from Bologna (*non longe a Bononiensi Urbe*). Furthermore, the presumed misunderstanding is unfounded considering that the first fourteen dioceses listed already include *Bersello*, that is Brescello (the ancient Brixillum).

¹⁰ The Huns, Goths and Sarnati led by Radagaisus at the end of 405 A.D. invaded northern Italy destroying Vigesimo on the Tuscan versant as well as Brento.

¹¹ G. Ciprio: "Descriptio Orbis Romani" by H. Gelzer, Leipzig 1890, page 32.



Paderno (267 metres above sea level): the route from the Futa pass constantly follows the top of the ridge. North of Paderno, it descends steeply towards Bologna, entering the city from Via San Mamolo.

Bologna, along the narrow valley of the torrent Aposa and enters the historic city centre through the S. Mamolo gate at an altitude of 74 metres above sea level.

If the Roman road followed (as was logical) the top of the ridge, it would have more or less coincided with the present-day road, seeing as there were no alternatives on the slopes of the hills, made particularly unstable by the presence of scaly clays (erosion furrows). Due to this geological condition and the continuous usage of the area, there was no hope of finding any remains of the Roman road and therefore we did not carry out any explorations. Nevertheless, although there is no archaeological evidence, the substantially straight line of the ridge which progressively slopes down to just a few hundred metres of the southernmost limit of the first urban settlement of Roman Bononia, convinced us that C. Flaminius had no other choice than to choose this route.

5 - The important pre-Roman transapennine pathway conditioned the choice of location for founding *Bononia* and showed C. Flaminius which route to follow.

We cannot start our last reflections regarding the motives for choosing the location of Roman Bononia without quoting one of the most beautiful pages written by Giancarlo Susini¹². This illustrious Scholar of Ancient and Roman History provides a very clear idea of the extreme importance of an available water supply, venerated in the ancient world as a deity:

“Water is an essential commodity, perhaps man’s principle resource; for a number of the ancient philosophers it was the fundamental element of creation, during every age it is a condition for existence. For this reason, the most ancient popular memories, or the traces of the oldest human settlements, coincide in

¹² Giancarlo Susini: “L’acqua, risorse, usi e religione” taken from: “Acquedotto 2000 - Bologna, l’acqua del duemila ha due mila anni”; published by Grafis, 1985, pages 14 and elsewhere.

every culture with the presence and the availability of water; similarly, the oldest pathways, the footprints of men travelling from one place to another, their first "roads" coincide with the tracks of the animals they followed through the bush, through clearings and through deserts on their quest for water: to drink, to heal. Therefore, hydronymies, that is place names along watercourses, are the oldest among the names given by man to the environment and the most tenacious in terms of conservation and survival (omissis).

The water collected from urban drains and from rivers and banks also had another function; it was used to irrigate crops and vegetable gardens, and in many cases, canals and ditches marked boundaries between one plot and another in a mainly agricultural society, such was society during the last two centuries of the Roman republic – between the foundation of Bononia, in 189 B.C., and the Augustan colony - the function of the water course was closely linked to how production was organised, the distribution of society and the structure of juridical custom (omissis).

Finally, a large watercourse was an important vector, a link between the Roman city and an emporium where it was possible to set sail towards the Po Valley Delta (omissis).

It has already been said that water – often malodorous or hot – also served to heal man and beast. However, the perennial outflow of water from the ground distinctively highlights its perpetual nature whereby it is continuously replaced but remains the same, making water the authentic symbol of eternity. Therefore its gurgling produces an inexhaustible and uncontrollable voice: the voice of a god; (omissis)".

Just like every other ancient population, the Romans held the highest regard for the presence of springs and watercourses when selecting where to establish urban settlements. Just think of the European capitals such as Rome on the Tiber, London (*Londinium*) on the Thames, Paris (*Lutetia Parisiorum*) on the Seine, Vienna (*Vindobona*) on the Danube and other great cities such as Lyon (*Lugdunum*) on the Rhone and Cologne (*Col. Claudia*) on the Rhine, Florence (*Florentia*) on the Arno, etc. In addition, within Emilia-Romagna when Rome was consolidating its dominion over the Po Valley, we can mention



(Taken from: "Acquedotto 2000: l'acqua del duemila ha duemila anni"; published by Grafis, 1987, page 132.)

Forlì (*Forum Livii*) on the Montone, Faenza (*Faventia*) on the Lamone, Imola (*Forum Corneli*) on the Santerno, Claterna on the Quaderna, Reggio Emilia (*Regium Lepidi*) on the Crostolo, Parma on the same river, etc.

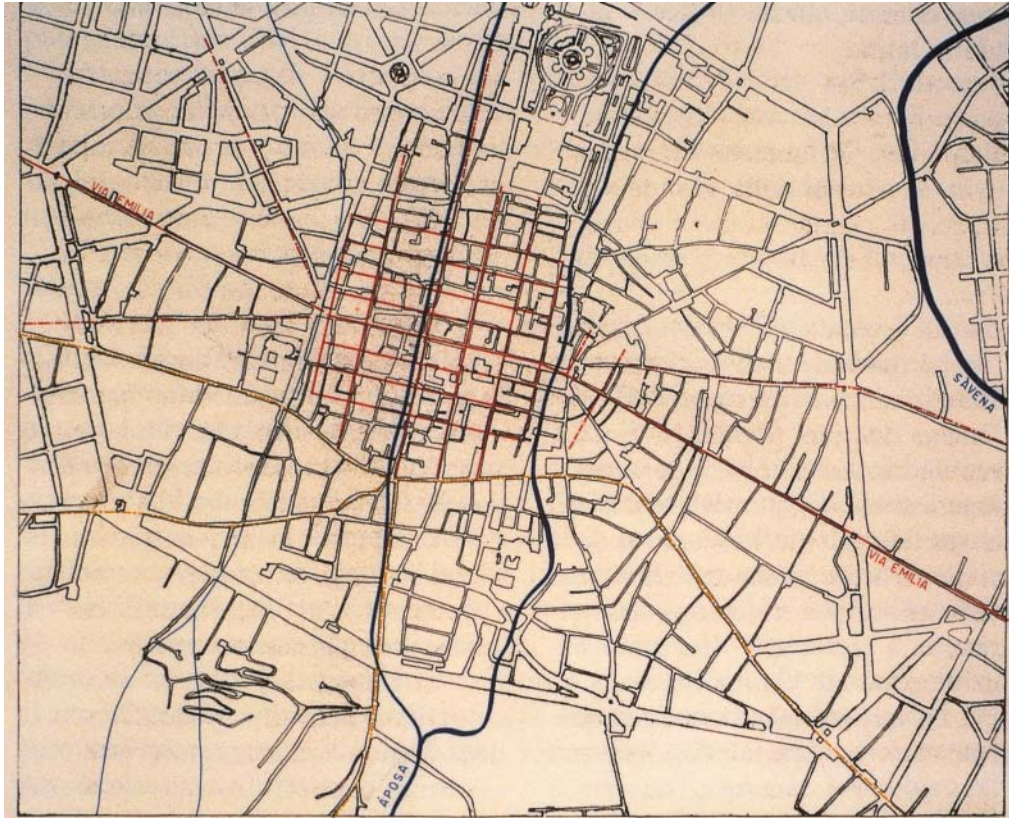
In the light of these facts, it is surprising that when the senators, Lucius Valerius Flaccus, Marcus Attilius Serranus and Lucius Valerius Tappone, were entrusted to found the Latin colony of Bononia in 189 B.C., they did not trace the first orthogonal plan of the city on the banks of the torrent Savena which flowed further east, nor on the banks of the Reno which flowed further west. It is especially difficult to explain why they did not choose the bank of the Reno at Casalecchio, where road system from the south reached its basin, or just a little further south in the present day suburb of Borgo Panigale, on the track running along the foot of the mountains

from Rimini and heading towards Piacenza, which already existed before the Via Aemilia was built.

Considering that the Romans' intelligence and capacity to utilise and exploit the land to every possible advantage is unquestionable, there must have been a very important reason (even more important that the need for abundant and convenient water) why they preferred to found a settlement on the banks of the very modest torrent Aposa¹³.

The reason may have been that they wanted to control trade from Etruria on the transapennine track along the ridge to the left of the Savena, in the exact spot where it entered the Po Valley and where it crossed the track at the foot of the mountains from Rimini towards north¹⁴.

To confirm the undoubted influence played by this pre-existing transapennine track



This plan of the first urban road system in Bononia (189 B.C.) illustrates that the cardo maximus (coinciding with the north-south Via Val D'Aposa, Via Venezian and Via Galliera) is perfectly aligned with the road that descends from the Apennines. Instead, the decumanus maximus (which coincides from east to west with Via Ugo Bassi and Via Rizzoli) forms an angle with their continuation towards the east (Strada Maggiore) and towards the west (Via S. Felice). (Drawing taken from "Storia di Bologna", published by Alfa, Bologna, 1978: Franco Bergonzoni, page 62).

¹³ The extremely scant and seasonal flow rate of the small torrent Aposa could certainly not have guaranteed a constant water supply even for the first few thousand Latin coloni.

¹⁴ Franco Bergonzoni in the volume "Storia di Bologna"; published by Alfa, Bologna, 1978: 62, writes: "in the year 189 B.C. the orthogonal layout of the city of Bononia was defined where the two ancient roads met, one descending along the valley of the torrent Aposa and the other running along the foot of the hills".

Sabatino Moscati, in an article entitled: "E il crocicchio divenne Bologna" published in the Espresso weekly magazine N. 25, year XXXIV on 26 June 1988, page 173, when mentioning the Etruscan origins of Felsina, ends with these words: "... however from the second half of the 8th century B.C., considerations differ, and this is reflected once again in the funereal finds which indicate that a dominant group had been established, holder of political power and economic wealth. Bologna discovered industry and it especially discovered its role as a great crossroads between central and northern Italy: the place where all trade had to pass. And so history is transformed from momentary to eternal because Bologna continues to be an essential and primary link, connection and switching point".

when choosing where to found Bononia, all one has to do is observe the first layout of the city reconstructed by Franco Bergonzoni¹⁵. The *cardo maximus* (present-day Via Val D'Aposa, Venezian and Galliera from north-south) was perfectly aligned with the transapennine track, whereas the *decumanus maximus* (present-day Via Ugo Bassi and Rizzoli from east-west), was offset compared to the track from Rimini to Piacenza, to the extent that it formed an angle with the roadhead of the first non-urban road system. This angle remained when two years later (and that is in 187 B.C.) the consul, M. Aemilius Lepidus traced the Via Aemilia, probably along the route of the existing track.

This observation gives the impression that in 189 B.C. the road through the Apennines was much more important than the road from Rimini. Otherwise, the founders of Bononia would have traced the *decumanus maximus* in alignment with the Rimini-Piacenza track and today, Strada Maggiore and Via S. Felice would be perfectly aligned with Via Ugo Bassi and Via Rizzoli.

Therefore, only an important pole of attraction such as control of transapennine traffic could have induced the Roman Senators to select this position, relatively distant from the rivers required to supply water to a colony destined to become the most important city in the region.

Nor could they rely on the flow rate of the torrent Aposa (extremely modest even in the winter) and which later proved to be absolutely

inadequate to meet the requirements of the community. After almost two centuries, during the reign of Augustus, an aqueduct was built which featured an underground conduit. It was about eighteen kilometres long and drew water from the Setta at its confluence with the Reno and conveyed it to Bologna, beyond the gate of S. Mamolo¹⁶.

If these considerations are founded, it is obvious that two years later, when C. Flaminius chose the route of the Bologna-Fiesole-Arezzo road, he exploited the pre-existing and important transapennine road system by straightening, widening and improving the carriageway, adapting it to Roman requirements and technical standards and paving the areas where the nature of the soil so demanded.

Numerous kilometres of paved road, discovered on the highest areas of the Apennine range, confirm this hypothesis (also supported by many other archaeological discoveries).

Livy does not detail the exact route followed by Flaminius, he just mentions the roadhead of departure (*Bononia*) and arrival (*Arretium*)¹⁷. Therefore, the road certainly started in Bologna and headed south across the Apennines.

This exact topographical indication does not explain why a number of contemporary scholars think that the departure point was in Claterna¹⁸, 15 kilometres further east, along the Via Aemilia, traced in the same year by the consul Marcus Aemilius Lepidus from Piacenza to Rimini¹⁹.

We covered this specific matter in a monograph published in 1989²⁰, where we put forward the logical reasons that openly conflict with the theory that removes the head of the road built by Flaminius from Bologna to Claterna,

¹⁵ Franco Bergonzoni: work cited, page 62.

¹⁶ At the end of the imperial age this aqueduct was abandoned and information about its existence was provided by the Abbot, Serafino Calindri, at the end of the 18th century after he had inspected and described the aqueduct (work cited, part one, page 189) and where he named it the "Augustan Conduit". In 1862, the Municipality of Bologna decided to re-use the conduit, entrusting Antonio Zannoni to carry out a survey and draw up an outline project. On 5 June 1881, the majestic conduit was officially reopened. It still contributes towards supplying water to Bologna.

¹⁷ T. Livius; work cited, book XXXIX, paragraph 2 – paragraph 2: "... *ne in otio militem haberet, viam a Bononia perduxit Arretium...*"

¹⁸ Claterna stood in the place now called "Maggio" near Ozzano Emilia.

¹⁹ The obvious division of the tasks entrusted to the two consuls also openly conflicts with this hypothesis. In fact, if C. Flaminius, who was entrusted to build the road from Bologna to Arezzo, had started in Claterna, to complete the transapennine road he would have had to first build the road from Claterna to Bologna (15 kilometres long) and two important bridges: on the Savena and Idice, a task which was the competence of M. Aemilius Lepidus. Otherwise, he would have had to wait until M. Aemilius Lepidus built the road from Bologna to Claterna and then start work on the transapennine road.

²⁰ Cesare Agostini - Franco Santi: "Analisi critica della via Flaminia Minore"; published by Costa, Bologna 1989, pages 12 and 13.

and blames this huge mistake on Livy. Here we would like to point out that Livy wrote at the end of the 1st century B.C.²¹ when this road was undoubtedly well known, still perfectly preserved and used, perhaps not by military traffic, but at least by light commercial traffic wanting a quick link to Tuscany. Claterna also existed in the same epoch. It was a large and rich city built on the important Via Aemilia. Because Livy was born in Padua, one must suppose that he had excellent knowledge of northern Italy. If the road under discussion had effectively started in Claterna, Livy would have made a

grave and obvious mistake, exposing himself to the quick criticism of his contemporaries and all the other information included in his monumental historic work would have also lost credibility.

Therefore, we give our full credit to Livy's exact indication, noting with disappointment how such a different and unmotivated interpretation is only upheld by those who today, in spite of the illuminating archaeological finds illustrated in this book, continue to claim that C. Flaminius traced the Bologna-Arezzo road along the watershed between the Idice and Sillaro, along the axis of the Claterna-Raticosa pass.

²¹ T. Livius was born in 59 B.C. in Padua where he died in 17 A.D.; he started to write the "History of Rome" in 27 B.C. and continued to write it until his death.

